

TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLES
EASTER SERMON
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Mark 1:40-44; Luke 5:12
S-1700

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.
(Mark 1:40-42)

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."
(Luke 5:12:)

I read these short verses and my heart yearns to get a handle on what really happened that day: tragedy to joy—rejection to acceptance—isolation to inclusion—uncertainty to certainty—fear to security—death to life—hateful religious leaders to the compassionate Christ.

One way to get a handle on this contemporary Biblical experience is to ask several questions.

●HOW BAD IS LEPROSY—REALLY?

No disease in the New Testament was regarded with more terror than leprosy. No other disease reduced a human being for no many years to so hideous a wreck. It was literally a living death.

1. *Nodular leprosy*
2. *Anesthetic leprosy*
3. *A mixture of the two (most common)*

Leprosy is really bad.

●WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE FULL OF LEPROSY?

Life as this man knew it came quickly to an end. Consider that he lost his future. No one ever got out of leprosy alive. He lost his friends, job, health, dreams, marriage, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and religion. He was numb with pain.

As terrible as the disease of leprosy was in itself, it was made doubly terrible by the treatment of the leper. This disease had serious social implications. Society's only known defense was quarantine. Lepers were cast out from society. They were totally alone.

●WHO ARE THE LEPERS OF TODAY?

There are still many lepers in the world. Leprosy flourishes in India, China, Malaysia, and worst of all, in Africa. Fortunately, leprosy is eradicated in America.

Most lepers in Jesus' day were known by their skin sores, swellings and raspy voices.

Most lepers today aren't like that at all—but look behind the façade, peek behind the masks, they are everywhere.

We are all lepers at one time or another—some more than others.

For many of us our pain is our leprosy.

●WHAT MADE JESUS' RESPONSE SO RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS?

He was “filled with compassion...”

*I wish we had an English equivalent of the Greek word translated “compassion.”
Σπλαγχνισθεις describes an intense internal, emotional response, like “all His insides
gushed forth with feeling.”*

Compassion only occurs when the emotional stir inside produces some outward manifestation of care and concern. If all we do is have the feeling then we might as well put our hands on our intestines and call it our stomachs—it is misguided and worthless.

It is easy to lose the feeling of compassion. We can snuff it out if we want to. But, we really don't want to.

Christ healed in many different ways. Sometimes He used clay mixed with water placed on blind eyelids. Other times, He spoke and a cure was perfected. But in the case of the leper, Jesus reached out and touched him. That touch spoke volumes!

There are lepers around us who haven't been touched in years. The very essence of Christianity is to touch the untouchable, love the unlovable and forgive the unforgivable.

My impression is that the church has not been very good at touching lepers. I am deeply sorry and broken hearted for those of you who have been hurt by the church. We will try to do better.

The world longs for us to be more real than right.
Too many of us Christians long to be more right than real.

●HOW CAN WE GET HEALED FROM OUR LEPROSY?

Come to Jesus—He is willing.

When Jesus touched the leper, his touch, rather than contaminating Jesus, cured the leper.